

Stengel Refuses to Look at '60 Crystal Ball

Fights Flu and Title Claim for Yankees —Ford Is Signed

By JOHN DREBINGER

A subdued and surprisingly conservative Casey Stengel held his first news conference of the year in the Yankee offices yesterday.

Admitting that he had "made a mistake" a year ago when he predicted the Bombers would walk off with their tenth American League pennant in eleven years — instead, they limped home third — the 69-year-old skipper made it plain he wasn't making that blunder again. He sounded almost as if he were hoping that what he was saying now would prove wrong again with reverse action.

"No sir, I'm predicting no pennant this time," said the crafty Casey. "Because the whole league has improved and while we're also better ourselves, we'll have to do better, a lot better, if we hope to come back where we belong."

Stengel, who is fighting off an influenza attack, shared the billing with Whitey Ford, the Bombers ace left-hander, who dropped around to sign his contract.

Ford's Salary Uncut

Whitey had disclosed more than a week ago that he was well pleased with the 1960 terms. And well he might be, because, despite his fall from the heights last year, Whitey did not suffer a salary cut, as other headliners did. The compact little lefty, who won sixteen games last season and faded badly in the second half, is understood to have signed again for \$35,000.

In insisting "we all gotta do better this year," Casey did not spare himself. "I guess I made my share of mistakes, too," said Casey. But when asked to amplify what those managerial



Casey Stengel puts contract in the pocket of Whitey Ford. At left is Roy Hamey, Yanks' assistant general manager.

miscues might have been he begged off.

"But I must have made some," said Casey. "When a ball club that you expect to win finishes third you just can't blame it all on the players. The manager must have made some mistakes, too, and I intend to find out what those were."

He said he based his claim to improvement since last fall on two counts. One is the acquisition of Roger Maris, the young outfielder acquired in

the seven-player deal with the Athletics. The other is the fact that the major casualties of 1959, notably Bill Skowron and Andy Carey, are again sound in wind and limb.

With Skowron on first, Bobby Richardson at second, Tony Kubek at short, Gil McDougald at third, and Carey, Cletis Boyer, Fritz Brickell and Joe DeMaestri, another Kansas City importation, in reserve, Stengel said, "we've got best infield for depth in the league."

Bombers' Pilot Says Club Will Have to Do 'Lot Better'

He admitted, however, the infield could be improved "if we could just get a take-charge guy to put more life in it." When a writer suggested that objective might be gained if the Yankees named a field captain, Stengel replied: "You may have something there. Maybe we'll try it."

Aid From Young Talent

The Yankees have not had a field captain since the late Lou Gehrig.

Pitching, Casey conceded, was still the club's major problem, with much depending upon Bob Turley. "When a pitcher drops from twenty-one victories to eight without anything physically the matter with him, you just don't know what to expect," said Casey.

However, he does expect a healthy Ford to make a strong comeback and he looks for Jim Coates, a young right-hander, and a lefty, Bill Short, a seventeen-game winner with Richmond, to revitalize the mound staff. Those three, plus Art Ditmar and Turley, loom as the five starters.

As for the opposition, Casey conceded that while he felt confident the Yanks would be stronger, the White Sox and Indians might prove even tougher than last year, when both finished well ahead of the Yanks.

"Both clubs improved themselves by trades this winter," said Casey. "And right now I gotta say I'm even more worried about Cleveland now that they've got Johnny Temple of the Reds in the infield."

"And that Minnie Minoso should help the White Sox. He drives in runs and also gets hit about sixteen or eighteen times just to get on base. Maybe that was the trouble with my fellers. They didn't get conked enough."